

Testimony before Michigan Senate Natural Resources Committee

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Personal background: University professor teaching wildlife management and conducting research on wildlife issues for 40 years. I began studying wild turkeys in the Upper Mississippi Valley in the 1970s and research on wild turkeys continues today.

The cornerstone to wildlife conservation was articulated nearly 100 years ago by Theodore Roosevelt. His doctrine of conservation stated that the careful stewardship of natural resources is a public responsibility and that *science is essential to the effective discharge of that responsibility*. Roosevelt founded the Boone and Crockett Club explicitly to stimulate the development of that science. The wild turkey represents one of the foremost successes of that doctrine.

1. **Science key to changing the paradigm:** Our early understanding of this species was too limited.
Conventional wisdom: *Wild turkeys are a species of the South and need large blocks (more than 15000 acres) of mature oak-hickory forest to thrive. They cannot inhabit the upper Mississippi Valley, Great Lakes and northeastern states: winters are too cold and snow is too deep, and landscapes have too much agriculture and too little forest.*
 - The breakthrough in our understanding of wild turkeys occurred in the late 1970s through research. Studies done in Minnesota, and later confirmed in Iowa and Missouri, showed that (1) wild turkeys could thrive in the cold, snowy winters so long as there was sufficient food; (2) agriculture was an important source of that food; and (3) the agriculture-forest mix common across the Lake States provided habitat that was far better than contiguous forest.
 - These research findings led to rapid growth in interest by northern states to establish wild turkey populations and agreement by southern states to contribute wild turkeys to trap-and-transfer programs. Trap-and-transfer programs grew through 1980s and continued through early 2000s.
2. **Hunter support essential to implementing the findings of research:** Science showed us how to restore populations and hunters helped us realize the potential.
 - Funding came through Pittman-Robertson and NGOs such as Nat'l Wild Turkey Federation.
 - Enthusiasm for hunting wild turkeys, especially in spring, minimized illegal hunting.
 - By 1995 wild turkeys were established across 49 states and today are estimated to number 7 million; upper Midwest and Great Lakes states estimated at 2 million birds.
 - Michigan has an estimated population of 200,000 and ranks among the best in the nation hunter success rate and hunter satisfaction are among the highest in the nation.
3. **Well-educated leadership necessary to addressing emerging challenges:** Early success stimulated widespread demand. Biologists working with leaders in government made wise strategic decisions about meeting that demand, and will continue to need to do so.
 - Participation in hunting is fastest growing hunting activity at 15% per year.
 - Wild turkeys and hunters are competing with a wide array of other interests for space as economic pressures intensify.
 - Engaging those interests will require integrating management of wild turkeys with management of the many economies that are based on natural resources.
 - Engaging the complex econometric and ecological methods will require commitment to ongoing learning.